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RUEHRO/AMEMBASSY ROME PRIORITY 0603
RUEHMD/AMEMBASSY MADRID PRIORITY 0133
RUEHEG/AMEMBASSY CAIRO PRIORITY 1462
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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [UNSC](#) [MASS](#) [MCAP](#) [KJUS](#) [PBTS](#) [LE](#) [SY](#) [IR](#)
SUBJECT: PRIME MINISTER HARIRI MEETS WITH CODEL MCCAIN

Classified By: Ambassador Michele J. Sison for reasons
1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: Increased U.S. military assistance to Lebanon is a priority, Prime Minister Saad Hariri told CODEL McCain on January 9. Though wary of Syrian intentions after his recent trip to Damascus, Hariri said he would work to build on positive practical steps to improve the bilateral relationship. Hariri argued for progress on comprehensive peace efforts based on the Arab Peace Initiative, and he urged that the U.S. adopt a cautious approach to Iran to avoid a counterproductive response. Senator McCain renewed his personal commitment to an independent and free Lebanon defending its sovereignty with a capable army. End summary.

CALL FOR INCREASED MILITARY ASSISTANCE

¶2. (C) Increased U.S. military assistance to Lebanon was a priority for him, PM Hariri told visiting Senators John McCain (R-AZ), John Barrasso (R-WY), John Thune (R-SD), and the Ambassador on January 9. Recalling the losses of the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) in the 2007 Nahr el-Barid conflict, Hariri bemoaned the LAF's poor equipment and appealed to the delegation to increase the quantity, delivery speed, and quality of U.S. military assistance. Hariri detailed the specific needs of the LAF, especially close air support, modern light arms, and field communications equipment. When Senator McCain asked if the LAF needed Apache attack helicopters, Hariri responded yes, but that he did not think the U.S. would supply them because of Israeli concerns. Hariri indicated he might turn to the Russians to obtain close air support helicopters instead of the previously proffered MIG-29 fighter jets. A well-equipped LAF, he said, would be used to combat three types of terrorists in Lebanon: extremists in the Palestinian refugee camps, "the killers of Rafik Hariri," and al-Qaeda. The LAF's outdated equipment also stacked up poorly against Hizballah's arsenal, Hariri argued. He complained that frequent Israeli violations of Lebanese airspace and territorial waters weakened efforts to undermine Hizballah's legitimacy and enforce UN Security Council Resolution 1701. IN response to Hariri's comments, Senator McCain outlined his commitment to a well-equipped LAF able to exert its authority over all Lebanese territory.

"BASHAR'S FINALLY IN FULL CONTROL"

13. (C) Turning to relations with Syria, Hariri described his recent trip to Damascus as the most difficult of the state visits he was undertaking as prime minister. Hariri perceived that Syrian President Bashar al-Asad was, for the first time, fully in control of the regime and that al-Asad was now rethinking his strategy of keeping Iran as Syria's sole strategic ally. Saudi, Turkish and French pressure and engagement had been useful in influencing Syrian behavior, Hariri assessed, and two days after Hariri's visit, al-Asad followed up with a call to discuss the mechanics of the border delineation commission. Along with the recently opened embassies, a mutually-agreed-upon border would demonstrate for the first time since independence Syrian recognition that Lebanon was a separate and independent country, Hariri added. Hariri suggested that while al-Asad had made some positive gestures, the relationship with Syria would continue to be difficult. Any initiative to build on these initial steps, he said, must not be at the expense of Lebanese sovereignty nor the justice that "must come" from the Special Tribunal for Lebanon, which he described as being in the hands of the international community.

CONCERN ABOUT REGIONAL ECHOES FROM IRAN

14. (C) Hariri argued that the search for comprehensive regional peace and Iran were intertwined, and he urged vigorous U.S. involvement in the former and a measured distance with the latter. Peace negotiations in the 1990s that were comprehensive, regional, and had a strong U.S. component, Hariri contended, achieved results and ultimately benefited Israel. The Arab Peace Initiative, he maintained, was a basis for progress that enjoyed the support of both the Arab League and the wider Organization of the Islamic Conference, and Hariri asked McCain to urge the Israeli leadership to renew the peace process.

15. (C) Hariri foreign policy advisor Mohamad Chatah worried that Tehran, under pressure from the reform movement, might create incidents externally to distract international attention. Hariri opined that the Iranian regime had "passed the point of no return" and could not survive without "going to war against the people." Still, Hariri counseled U.S. distance from the Iranian opposition and caution in the region due to Iran's history of seeking external scapegoats to justify internal weakness. Hariri stressed that Lebanese independence and freedom were non-negotiable even though many in the region did not want the democracies of Lebanon and Iraq to succeed. The biggest threat to Iran's regime, he underscored, was the example of a Sunni prime minister in Beirut and a Shia one in Baghdad democratically elected and working across ethnic and confessional lines.

16. (SBU) U.S. participants:

Senator John McCain
Senator John Thune
Senator John Barrasso
Christian Brose, Foreign Affairs Advisor for Senator McCain
Vance Serchuk, Foreign Affairs Advisor for Senator Lieberman
Brooke Buchanan, Press Secretary for Senator McCain
Capt. John Nowell, Military Escort
Ambassador Michele Sison
Joshua Polacheck, poloff (notetaker)

17. (SBU) Lebanese participants:

Prime Minister Saad Hariri
Nader Hariri, Chief of Staff for the Prime Minister
Mohamed Chatah, Foreign Policy Advisor for the Prime Minister
Karma Ekmekji, Director of International Relations for the Prime Minister
Amal Mudallali, Prime Minister's Washington representative
Nadine Majzoub, notetaker

18. (U) CODEL McCain did not have an opportunity to clear this cable.

